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ABSTRACT

The purpose of a resource center for public school services, which this paper discusses, is to serve as a liaison between the needs of public school personnel and the expertise offered by a college of education. Services offered by the center might include curriculum development and evaluation, psychological services, inservice education, and advisory services for administrators. This paper describes a typical sequence of events following a call to the center by public school personnel, including assessment of the problem, selection of faculty to work on it, development of a plan of action, and evaluation. If college or university service to the community is to become more than an appealing catchword, the paper concludes, agencies like the resource center must make it happen. (Author/LD)

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# Meeting the Needs of the Public Schools: a Resource Center for Public School Services

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When knowledgeable people are asked to define the principal functions of a college or university, a familiar litany emerges: teaching, research, and service. If such people are truly knowledgeable, they also know that the percentage of time and effort devoted to each of these, and the magnitude and significance of outcomes related to each, are impressively different for different institutions. Perhaps the greatest differences are those pertaining to the research and service functions, where the discrepancy between lip-service pronunciamentoes and reality can be disquieting. And "service", it turns out in many cases, is a socially useful noun that serves to mask a noticeable inability of the institution to offer anything that might meet that definition in anything other than an unsystematic or even haphazard manner.

This paper describes a systematic approach to the provision of need-directed services to public schools by colleges of education. Certainly colleges and schools of education should be well organized to provide systematic and need-based services to the public schools, since so much of their activity, such as student teaching, relates directly to ongoing programs and activities in the public schools. But so often this is not true. All too often public school personnel who need help with a problem will suffer initial frustration in their attempts to get help from a college or university in their area because

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they don't know how to go about it, they don't know what resources might be available to assist them, and they don't know whom to contact. Under these circumstances they may either give up in their attempts to seek help, or accept potluck services arranged by the most available or best-known representative of the institution from which they seek help. Since that representative may or may not be totally knowledgeable about the range of resources available at his/her own institution, the procedures may be awkward and the outcome uncertain or worse.

Confronted with the evident need of school systems to make more effective use of the resources and expertise of colleges of education, the author, as a former dean of a college of education, attempted to find a better way. He established, with the help of others, a liaison office known as the Resource Center for Public School Services. Located in the college of education, the Resource Center had one overarching purpose: to create the most efficient and effective mechanism possible for linking the specific needs of public school personnel with the expertise in the college of education and university which could most effectively meet those needs. At the outset it was obvious that this was a task requiring exceptional skills of coordination, but also no small measure of creativity in matching needs with just the right resources to provide optimal fulfillment of those needs. Recognition of these requirements established the basic parameters of the task and brought both the organizational and personnel aspects of the planning effort into better perspective.

A coordinating agency that is creative in matching public school needs with university resources is an ambitious task, but the concept seems to have been fulfilled admirably in the day-to-day operations of the Resource Center for Public School Services. The Resource Center is staffed by a full-time Coordinator, obviously a critical person, and a secretary. Public school personnel who want to make use of the services of the Center either call the Coordinator or make an appointment to see the Coordinator at the Center office. Often the initial telephone call is followed by an office visit. A typical sequence of events involves the following steps:

1. A person in the public schools calls the Coordinator of the Resource Center and describes a problem or a need for which assistance is requested. The Center has become known to this person through explanatory materials distributed to public school personnel or by word of mouth.

2. Considerable time and effort is devoted to the careful definition of the problem or need. Sometimes this can be accomplished by telephone, but in other cases an office visit may be indicated. It is not at all unusual for some redefinition of the problem to occur in order to facilitate the development of more and/or better problem solutions. This is obviously a most critical phase in the sequence and requires

effective communication skills, understanding, sensitivity, and creativity on the part of the Coordinator.

3. The Coordinator selects the faculty member or faculty team that best meets the requirements of the problem or need defined. The Coordinator is in an excellent position to accomplish this, for previous studies have been conducted by the Center to catalog the specific areas of interest and expertise of all members of the faculty. This extensive knowledge, plus the knowledge that comes with working with a faculty over a long period of time, serves the Coordinator well in what can only be described as the creative act of matching need with resources--the essence of the task. It is also that part of the task that no one outside the college or university can do as effectively. During the process the Coordinator must also interact with the public school person presenting the problem to insure that the faculty member or faculty team selected is perceived as satisfactory in terms of competence, effectiveness of working relationships, and any other characteristics that may seem important. In some cases, of course, the selection of faculty may not be necessary, for the Coordinator may discover that the situation

requires only suggestions about material resources and not human resources, or the Coordinator may discover that the short-term assistance of the Coordinator alone will suffice. In any and every case the form of assistance rendered demonstrates a flexibility of approach on the part of the Coordinator and a clear and defensible relationship to the problem or need presented. The entire operation takes place in a context where it is the self-defined needs of the public school personnel that assume preeminent importance, and it is then the principal obligation of the Coordinator, working with public school personnel, to develop a tailor-made program of assistance that effectively meets those self-defined needs.

4. The faculty member or faculty team meets with the public school personnel, plans are developed (often with further assistance from the Coordinator) and the program or project begins. The Coordinator keeps in contact with participating faculty members and the public school personnel with whom they are working throughout the duration of the program or project, and assessment of progress is made at regular intervals.

5. Some form of evaluation, formal or informal, is conducted either by faculty participants or the

Coordinator at the end of each project.

The original plans for the development of the Resource Center for Public School Services called for services to be offered in four principal areas:

Curriculum Development and Evaluation

Psychological Services

Innovative Field-Based Approaches to In-Service Education

Advisory Services for Public School Administrators

These four areas are intended to be suggestive only, and in actual practice requests and services may represent overlap of some of the areas or something not covered in any of the areas. The category of Curriculum Development and Evaluation is self-explanatory, and no further comment is necessary. Psychological Services encompass such topics as mainstreaming, classroom management techniques with exceptional children, learning disabilities, the preparation of individual educational plans, psychological assessment, counseling techniques, and many others. Services might include group seminars, individual testing in university clinics or by supervised interns in the field, consultations with parents and/or teachers, workshops, the evaluation of existing psychological services, and the planning and development of psychological service centers. Innovative Field-Based Approaches to In-Service Education is also a very inclusive category encompassing services that typically have three important characteristics in common: they are field-based, they are based on the perceived needs of the public school personnel requesting the service, and they involve

cooperative relationships among teachers, school administrators, and teacher educators in the planning and implementation of the in-service program or project. The word "innovative" in the title obviously expresses the intent to find different and more effective ways to approach the in-service task. Cooperative planning teams, needs assessment, specialized courses in continuing education, teaching centers, and new delivery systems are among the many possibilities that could be considered. Advisory Services for Public School Administrators, like Curriculum Development and Evaluation, is another generic and probably self-explanatory category which encompasses the entire range of specific-need services that might be requested by school administrators.

A modest grant for the support of the Resource Center for Public School Services was received from the state as a part of the university operating budget earmarked for the improvement of university programs and services. Such support is indicative of the real need perceived by citizens and state legislators and officials for the kinds of services offered by the Center. From the inception of the Center each of the four service areas described above has had its own advisory committee, which consisted of faculty members with expertise and acknowledged contribution in the area. A representative from each of the four advisory committees also serves on an overall advisory council, which oversees the total operation of the Resource Center and advises the Coordinator on matters of policy and program. Faculty participation in the provision of Center

services has shown a marked increase over the period of time the Center has been in existence, with approximately 100 faculty members involved in some aspect of the Center's activities. Since these faculty members have full-time teaching assignments, they receive modest stipends for the services performed. Funds for these stipends come from participating local school systems, supplemented when necessary from the limited budget for the Center. It is likely that the future will see greater participation by public school personnel in the Center advisory committees and in the provision of services.

The Resource Center for Public School Services has been extremely successful, and given continued funding and support it should have a very promising future. If college or university service to the community is to become more than an appealing but misleading catchword, it is agencies like the Resource Center for Public School Services that will make it happen. The Resource Center is perhaps but one of many ways to make it happen, but actual experience with it, and the cataloguing of benefits received by school systems from its services, suggest that it is one of the best.